



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 8 January 1969



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
8 JANUARY 1969

1. Soviet Union

The Soviets appear to be getting ready for another manned space flight. Judging by the movement of the space support ships, the launch will probably occur within the next week. The pattern of the ships' deployment indicates the flight will stay in earth orbit and not go circumlunar. The last Soviet manned flight was Soyuz-3 in late October.

Another Venus mission may also be coming up.

2. Israel-France

The Israelis recently took unauthorized "delivery" on two French-built patrol boats. De Gaulle's irritation at this action undoubtedly contributed to the latest French embargo on arms deliveries to Israel.

The 147-foot fast patrol boats

[redacted]
[redacted] were being tested by Israeli crews who apparently kept going without bothering to clear their departure with French authorities.

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The French embargo will handicap the Israeli Air Force more than the other services and may lead to reduced flying within a short time. Of Israel's current inventory of 258 fighters, 228 are French built. The effect of the embargo on French delivery of the MD-620, a 270-mile range surface-to-surface missile, is not known.

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3. South Vietnam

A "very urgent" message was sent on 4 January by the North Vietnamese high command in Hanoi to virtually all major Communist headquarters in South Vietnam. Although this sort of transmission does not invariably foreshadow widespread attacks, the last time one was observed was on 16 November--just before a period of stepped-up enemy activity throughout much of the country.

4. Czechoslovakia

The party presidium has done some artful dodging. To mollify the conservatives, the presidium recommended National Assembly President Smrkovsky, a liberal, be dropped back one notch to become first vice president of the new federal parliament. This move, the presidium probably hopes, will not be viewed as a serious political eclipse by Smrkovsky's backers.

The nomination of a moderate, Deputy Premier Peter Colotka, to be president of the federal parliament also represents a move to ease tension between the contending camps.

5. Lebanon

When Prime Minister Yafi offered his government's resignation on Monday, he was going through a typically Lebanese political maneuver designed to dampen growing public criticism in times of crisis. The cabinet, however, has fallen to squabbling over who was responsible for the airport debacle, and its work has come to a standstill. A national coalition cabinet will probably emerge from all this.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of US
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

More Chinese Engineers May Be Leaving:

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Communist China may gradually be withdrawing engineer units from the northeastern area of North Vietnam as they complete their construction projects--a pattern observed earlier in the northwest. Since September the number of radio terminals controlled by the Second Railway Engineer Division at Kep has dropped from eight to four.

The new railroad between Kep and Hon Gai is in the latter stages of construction. In addition, other transportation improvements probably are nearing completion. Also, the North Vietnamese are reported to be bearing a larger share of the work.

The five division-size engineer units that were in North Vietnam at the peak of Chinese involvement probably have now dwindled to no more than two. There are, in addition, an estimated four Chinese antiaircraft divisions in North Vietnam, whose primary mission is to protect the engineering projects. These units have not been reduced thus far.

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More Domestic Planning: Hanoi has turned its attention to still another domestic problem not directly related to the war--developing the mountainous

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border areas of the country. Politburo member and economic specialist Le Thanh Nghi in a speech given prominent publicity by the local press in mid-November (only recently available) has indicated that the regime has resurrected plans for a priority project that was shelved during the bombing years. Nghi said the initial emphasis in these areas will be on agricultural development designed to get the nomadic tribes to settle down on state-supervised reclamation projects. This will be accompanied by efforts to improve communications and open transportation routes, thus permitting more intensive geological exploration of the region.

Although Hanoi spokesmen traditionally talk in terms of economic objectives when discussing the development of these areas, there are strong defense and security reasons for improving the regime's control there. These areas, with their long, insecure border with Laos and China, are inhabited by minority peoples who harbor a traditional enmity not only toward the ethnic Vietnamese but also toward the regimentation of the Communist regime.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report today.

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